



On the road to Jubilee 2012

From 1960 to 1970 . . .

Second Vatican Council starts decade of renewal in Loretto

Editor's Note:

A Vatican Council is one of the highest decision-making bodies in the Roman Catholic Church; in authority second only to the College of Cardinals. With all the pomp and circumstance of Rome, such a Vatican Council convened on Oct. 11, 1962. Four years later, the Council of "Vatican II," as it came to be known, had enacted 16 "texts" initiating some of the most profound changes ever to sweep through the Catholic Church and throughout the religious world. The liturgy would henceforth be in the language of the people, and there would be increased openness and cooperation with other religions and denominations.

Traditionally, such august convocations had been the province of men only. No women allowed. One of the Vatican II "firsts" was the invitation to 15 prominent women leaders of the church to attend as official "auditors." They had no voting authority but could participate on several commissions charged with drafting the Council's resolutions. Mary Luke Tobin SL was Mother General of the Sisters of Loretto at that time. She was among the 15 women who were invited; eight other women were eventually added to their number before the Council ended.

In 1996 Mary Luke recounted those events as an invited speaker for a series of lectures called, "The Spirit of the Century: The Twentieth in Review," given at First Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Englewood, Colo. What follows are excerpts from that talk in her own words.

1633 — 1812
Catholics Settle in America,
Loretto Story Begins

1812 — 1830
Loretto Foundation and Early Days;
Moving Beyond Kentucky

1830 — 1900
Education Mission Expands;
Loretto Pushes Westward

1900 — 1960
Education Efforts Diversify;
First Loretto Infirmary Opens
1923: Loretto in China

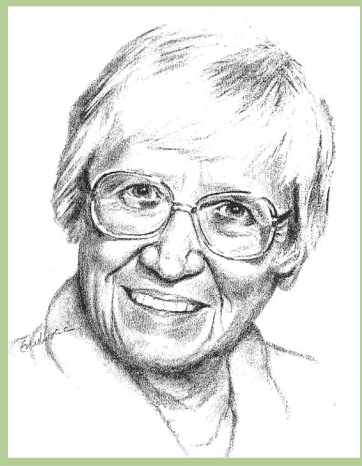
1960 — 1970
Decade of Renewal;
Loretto Studies Guidelines, Governance
1960: Loretto in Latin America

1970 — 1990
New Government Structure;
Loretto Works for Justice/Peace
1989: Loretto in Ghana

1990 — 2000
Co-membership Continues to Flourish;
Loretto and Ecological Awareness

2000 — 2012
Loretto Leadership Expands;
Sister Communities Embrace
2009: Loretto in Pakistan

2012
Loretto Celebrates 200th Jubilee!



Mary Luke Tobin SL

Excerpted from a 1996 talk.

I love to talk about Vatican II because to me it was a great turning point in the Catholic Church when a very important series of changes took place. It was called by a great pope, John XXIII, and it involved the Roman Catholic bishops of the world — all 2,500 of them. They came from all parts of the world and met in Rome for four tumultuous, productive years. Vatican II

introduced major changes into an ancient institution that has been said to be unchangeable. Well, the church is able to be changed, and we witnessed those changes.

I am going to tell you what I consider the three most important changes that Vatican II introduced. First of all, it's true that neither I nor any woman ever expected to get there, but the group of women that I represented, the Sisters of the United States, had elected me president. They said to me, when we met after my election, "Well, Vatican II is going on. Why don't you go over there? We know women are not officially invited, but you can stand around the corridors, learn what you can and come back and tell us about it so we'll know what's going on."

So I got on a ship and started out for Rome in the fall of 1964. While I was on the ship, a young staff worker came up to me and asked my name. I told him, and he said, "There's a telephone call for you up in the wireless room." I didn't know you could get a telephone call on a ship! I went to the wireless room, and sure enough, there was a telephone and a wireless operator with a little green eye shade. He said, "This is the first time I've had three telephone calls for one woman at the same time!" Something was brewing.

I went, delighted, to the phone, and the voice at the other end said, "This is so-and-so of the New York Times. How do you

Elaine Prevallet SL

"I have vivid memories of the excitement and hope expressed so enthusiastically by Sister Mary Luke in 1996. Luke experienced the thrill of discovering that the Catholic Church can **change!** And truly Loretto did change! Our doors opened: "the world" which had once been avoided as seductive, was now the arena of our mission. "We work for justice and act for peace because the gospel urges us" became a mandate for our community. Though the 50 years since Vatican II have seen regression rather than the hoped-for advances, Loretto holds onto trust and hope: the Spirit of God will not be bound!

feel about being invited to Vatican II?" I said, "Would you please repeat that?"

The powers in Rome had made the momentous decision to invite 15 women from around the world to attend as auditors of Vatican II. (No threat to 2,500 bishops.) The 15 of us — later there were eight more — became official participants from then until the end of Vatican II. It was a marvelous experience.

This even indicated that the old church has the potential and power within it to bring about enormous changes — and it did! Young people growing up as Catholics today have no idea of how those changes affected not only the liturgy of the church, but so much else in their upbringing.

Somebody asked me the other day, "Now that the pope won't ordain women, are you going to leave the church?"

"How ridiculous can you be?" I said. "Of course not. I don't intend to leave the church ever. It's my heritage, it's my background, it's the richness it has brought to my life. Of course not."

"Well, then, what are you going to do if you're excommunicated?" someone asked. I said, "I'll figure that out at the time."

Of course, I think that the ordination of women depends on one's concepts of both men and women being equal. There are differences, of course. In fact, the French say, "Vive la difference!" Yet basically men and women share the same human nature. There are differences, but they are not decisive differences. That leads to the first principal statement of Vatican II.

Every form of discrimination against persons, either because of religion, nationality, race or gender, must be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.

The Gospel is in those words. For me it was a sentence worth memorizing. That's what we were told to do and taught to do, and we have to find it again in every age.

In Rome

When I reached Rome, I soon met the other women from other parts of the world, and we developed wonderful rapport. One of the most important was a woman from Australia named Rosemary Goldie. Rosemary was well known in Rome. She was in the Office of the Laity there and is a brilliant, gifted woman

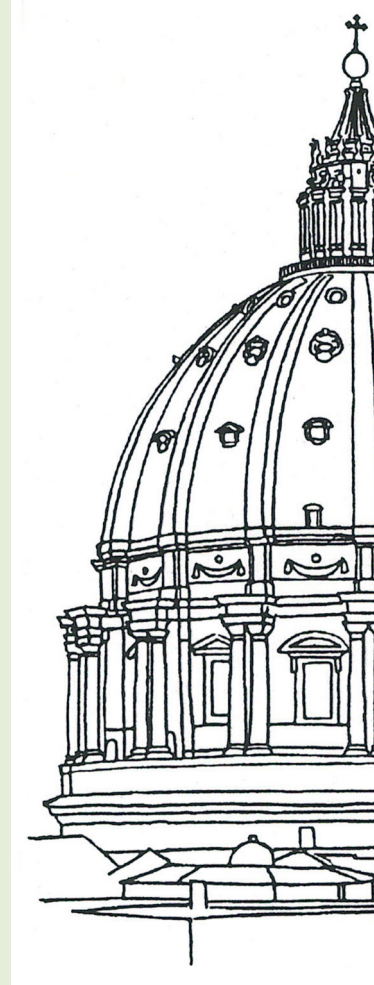


Illustration of St. Peter's Basilica dome

and accomplished linguist. I sat next to her because I certainly did not know any other languages. She translated for me many of the things that had to be in Latin because the bishops wouldn't have caught onto them if there weren't. She was invaluable.

The second important change I brought home from Vatican II was a statement by Rosemary Goldie. The women auditors were given permission to serve on some of the commissions. The commissions were working on documents, and they were gathering from all the bishops how the documents should be phrased.

Rosemary and I were put on the "Commission on the Church in the Modern World" where I really wanted to be. There was a French theologian there, Yves Congar was his name. He died very recently. He gave a little speech in front of the commission meeting, and he said, "You know, I want to say something good about women in the church." And so he read a very beautiful sentence. Then he looked over to us and said, "Rosemary, what do you think about my sentence?"

She didn't answer. He said, "Come, Rosemary, tell me what you think about inserting my sentence." And Rosemary made the statement that I have carried around with me ever since. She said, "*Père Congar, you can leave out all those nice flowery sentences about women. All you need to say is that women expect of the church to be treated and recognized as the full human persons they are in the church, and that's enough.*"

I don't think he understood to the day he died what she was saying. "Recognized as full human persons in the church and treated accordingly." When I came back to the United States, that was one of the two messages I certainly brought with me.

I am a believer that the tradition we are rooted in is very important, and I am also a believer in the fact that this tradition brings both good and bad things out of it. We have to think of some bad things about the total Catholic tradition, and we have to see them as that. But we also have to think of some beauties and riches in the Catholic tradition that we celebrate today.

Another significant step the Council took was to talk about the church and the churches. The idea of salvation only within the Catholic Church was banished. The Roman Catholic Church is one among the Christian churches, and the ecumenical movement is to be encouraged.

Mary Catherine Rabbitt SL

"When I entered Loretto in the fall of 1964, Vatican II was in progress and Mary Luke Tobin (then known as Mother Mary Luke) was there! So, my entire 46 years in the community have been influenced by Vatican II. Loretto, together with many other religious communities, took the reform efforts to heart. Loretto in a post-Vatican II world was (and still is) open to possibilities.

I know that I personally would never have had the opportunity to go to law school and practice law as a member of the community were it not for the reforms of Vatican II. Now, there is no turning back!

Maureen McCormack SL

"It was an exciting time to be alive in a church that was alive. We were in the thick of it because our own Mary Luke Tobin was there. During the 10 years that I had been a Sister of Loretto before women's participation in Vatican II, the structures of religious life were my daily bread and just what my spirit needed. Now we were embarking on a new path. We took the call for renewal very seriously. The changes in religious life and in the church allowed fresh breezes to enter my being and transform my spirit. Most dramatic for me were changes in the liturgy, in the role of the laity, being enriched by other faith traditions, and being part of a single global community.

There was also another passage in the same document on "the Church and the Churches." *It said that the Catholic Church must open itself to the churches of the world, including the churches of the East.* I have always loved that study anyway, and so it was a delight to me to hear Catholics encouraged to look to the East and find something of the great traditions of the East that would be a learning experience for all of us. And I have. For that reason, I think for Vatican II to open its doors in that direction was very valuable for me.

I would take those three highlights as the most important. My life was forever changed in the sense of being open to the things that Vatican II opened.

People I met made a great difference to me. Some of them are still living, some are not. One of them still living is a great Benedictine monk named Godfrey Diekmann [he has since died]. He was editor of *Worship* magazine for a number of years. We got acquainted early because I wanted to learn from him why he



by Mark Tenney.

Marian McAvoy SL

“The 1960s brought changes to the church, certainly, as well as to Loretto. My own life is an example. The decade saw me move from a high school English teacher wearing a habit to a religious educator in contemporary garb teaching Catholic adults about the theological basis for the Vatican Council and preparing them to take on roles as decision makers on parish councils. A new master’s degree in pastoral theology had prepared me for this work.

As a delegate to Loretto’s Special Chapter in the late ’60s, I celebrated as that body accepted a new government structure for the community based on shared participation in decision-making, both on the personal and the communal level. The respect for each person and his or her capacity to make decisions as adults was a part of two key principles of the Council’s deliberations: subsidiarity and collegiality. They are, I’m glad to report, still operative within Loretto.

Denise Ann Clifford SL

“The years after Vatican II were exhilarating times in the church. I was involved in parochial school education when the changes of Vatican II began to filter down through ecclesial levels to the parishes. The leadership in Loretto had already initiated a major study of our rule and customs, and had implemented changes in community life and religious attire.

Before Vatican II, we were respected as “the nuns” who taught the children in the parish school and religious education program. As the spirit of Vatican II unfolded, we were recognized leaders and teachers in the process of creating a new image of church as the “people of God.” We were . . .

- . . . nominated and elected to newly formed parish councils and committees;
- . . . selected for new liturgical roles: ministers of the Eucharist, lectors, cantors;
- . . . instructors in adult education classes in scripture, theology, and parenting classes especially in regard to the sacraments of Initiation, Baptism, and Eucharist;
- . . . members of study groups exploring and recommending how to implement the directives of Vatican II in our individual parishes; and
- . . . creating and renewing communities dedicated to the work of the Gospel.

was so concerned about making the liturgical movement a part of Vatican II.

He was on the committee and he did it. He did a lot of things besides turning the altar around and establishing the vernacular as the language of worship.

The Council ended by the first of the year of 1966. So in December of 1965 there was a great outdoor finale. I remember the bishops were sitting in long lines in front of St. Peter’s, and if you’ve been there you know how big it is. Up at the front, right in front of the door, was seated the pope, who by this time was Paul VI. He was seated facing out, and all the bishops were in rows. Again, this is colorful drama, very rich in its presentation, with the marvelous Gregorian chant singers.

I must give you something of the setting. The picture that I want to describe is enormously colorful. Those bishops in their robes of purple, and then the white, and then the gold, and then St. Peter’s, and then all the lights on, all the candles lighted — it was a great celebration, a great time. It was a great visual representation of a church bringing itself together.

The program at the end of the Mass was to honor certain people in the church. They brought people out in fours, and the first were four artists. They came out and made a little bow to the pope and went up and received from him a little scroll. Then they went off and four historians came forward, then four musicians. Finally four women, and they bowed and went up and got their little scrolls.

I turned to Godfrey Diekmann, who was sitting next to me, and I said, “Godfrey, that’s all wrong.”

“Wrong, Sister? What’s the matter with it? They should honor these people for what they’ve done for the church.” I said, “I’ll tell you what’s wrong, Godfrey. Women are not a category in the church!” He looked at me and he said to me, “Sister, you’re right. But we don’t see it, we don’t understand it, and you’re going to have to explain it to us.”

I thought that was a pretty big man who said that to me, and so every time thereafter he mentioned it in print, I wanted to thank him an extra time because he has lived up to this vision in some of his own writings.

No, women are not a category in the church. The church itself is men and women. Men and women attempting to live out the Gospel and to listen to the words of Jesus and to form that kind of a body of people who have heard those words and who are trying to live them out together in the church. It’s not the edifice; it’s not St. Peter’s; it’s not any gathering of associations. It’s the men and women who form the church.

I look back on Vatican II with great affection, not only because the changes were much in line with what I would have wanted anyway, but also because it gave me the insight that the church can change.

